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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**Welcome Address by RADM Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education & 2nd
Minister for Defence, at the Opening Ceremony of the 2nd APEC Education
Ministerial Meeting
6 Apr 2000, The Canning Room, The Westin Stamford**

National Archives of Singapore
“Re-envisioning Education for the 21st Century”

Mr Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister
Distinguished Ministers & Secretaries of Education from the APEC Economies
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I would like to begin by extending a very warm welcome to our foreign guests from the APEC region. Singapore is honoured to have the opportunity to host the Second APEC Education Minister's Meeting.

2. It is indeed fitting that the first APEC ministerial meeting of the new century should be one on Education. A new century brings with it the promise of new opportunities and new beginnings. There is no better way to celebrate this than to renew our commitment to investing in our people and our future.

The 1st AEMM

3. When the Education Ministers last met in 1992 in Washington DC, we discussed the importance of good education standards in the 21st century. We noted the social and economic well-being that high-quality education could help our people achieve. The Meeting ended with a call for closer co-operation among member economies.

4. Since then, we have forged closer links by establishing the APEC Education Forum to discuss high priority educational issues. Our economies have also set up APEC Study Centres and shared information through projects and joint research. To build rapport and understanding among the peoples of our region, we have encouraged people-to-people interactions that have in turn facilitated the exchange of ideas and expertise. These include the University Mobility in Asia-Pacific and the APEC Youth Networking projects. Following the success of the 1st APEC Youth Science Festival held in the Republic of Korea in 1998, about 1,000 students and educators from APEC economies will meet in Singapore for the 2nd APEC Youth Science Festival in July this year. These examples demonstrate the deep commitment which member economies have in developing the human resource of our region through greater exchanges and interactions.

5. At the Leaders' Meeting in Vancouver in 1997, the APEC Leaders recognised the growing importance of people-to-people exchange as a strategy to enhance the collective learning of the APEC community. They welcomed the initiative to establish an APEC Education Hub in Singapore, including the granting of scholarships to APEC students. This initiative has been successfully launched at the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. I am also happy to note that the network of education hubs is expanding to include education institutions from other economies, e.g. the Republic of Korea. It is this collective spirit of creating opportunities for the peoples of the Asia-Pacific that will determine the future growth and success of this initiative.

Future Challenges for Education

6. Since 1992, human resource development has taken on greater urgency, for two key reasons. Firstly, globalisation has dramatically altered how we learn, work,

live and play. Global influences challenge the existing work practices and ethics of many local workforces. Intellectual capital is fast replacing money and labour as the key factor in ensuring an economy's competitive advantage in the borderless world.

7. Secondly, rapid advances in science and technology have transformed the dynamics of economic competition. It is now inter-dependent, time sensitive and ever-changing. While we are still grappling with the changes that the information revolution will bring, the dawn of a new revolution in the life sciences is already upon us. Workers must be nimble and flexible to respond to and take advantage of the new knowledge-based economy, which is driven by ideas and information. They must be entrepreneurial and willing to take risks. More importantly, the 21st century worker must have the capacity to access and process information so that new ideas can be created and innovative services provided. Workers' skills and knowledge must be upgraded; they must be retrained and retooled.

8. Education enables us to develop and harness the talents and abilities of our people for economic well-being in the global market. What they learn, how they learn and when they learn will determine if they have the requisite attitudes, skills and knowledge to thrive.

9. Education also provides the individual with an anchor in the fundamental values and beliefs of the society in which he is a member. Education helps to sustain, refine, and occasionally, re-shape and re-define the kind of society which we aspire to live in.

10. This is particularly crucial in a time of rapid change. Education must be a catalyst for change; it cannot be passive. Education must embrace change, while remaining rooted in timeless values. What these timeless values should be and who decides on them are issues which different communities have to sort out in their own ways.

11. Thirdly, Education is a means of forging closer people-to-people exchanges. Globalisation need not be feared as a threat, but should instead be personalised and made more meaningful, so that it becomes a welcome addition to each of our societies. And because Education especially targets the young, we have the opportunity to develop in young people a sense of living in a wider community when their minds are open and receptive.

12. As a region, we have always called for greater people-to-people exchange and I am heartened by the many fine programmes and initiatives promoting this aim

in the Asia-Pacific. Some of these also have the distinction of harnessing Information Technology (IT) as a tool to promote friendship and understanding. Through the Internet, primary school children in Chile and Singapore interact once a month to learn about each other's culture. Teachers are also using IT. Practitioners in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, the US and beyond are exchanging ideas on-line about students' learning and generating new and improved teaching strategies for them.

Re-envisioning Education for the 21st Century

13. The theme for this meeting is "Education for Learning Societies in the 21st Century". It is an uplifting and motivating theme. It expresses an ideal which we all strive for.

14. There is much that we can share and discuss. The diversity of our economies is a strength. In coming together to talk about the future challenges facing Education and how we intend to meet them, we can help each other to see more clearly what the common threads are, and where we differ in terms of philosophies, strategies or even tactics.

15. We will also have the opportunity to get down to some "nuts and bolts" of the business of Education, from teacher selection and training, to the use of technology, and quality assurance in school management. It will be interesting to see how even similar philosophies in education can be implemented in different ways.

16. I look forward to a highly educational exchange of views and ideas in these two days.

17. In closing, let me wish all of you a happy stay in Singapore.

18. Thank you

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